

# At Divorce U, women help women through process of divorce



The journey through a divorce can be puzzling and pricey.

Divorce U Solutions co-founders Catherine Shanahan and Karen Chellew try to show their clients the way.

"We both believe in marriage. We are not sitting here running up the divorce flag. We just want people to be happy," said Shanahan. "We're all about empowering people to be able to make choices themselves."

Both women have gone through divorces, and they hope to empower women to walk through their own divorces feeling informed and confident.

Married at age 19, Chellew learned the hard way that, without the right help, divorce can be financially and emotionally costly.

"I spent an incredible amount of money because I didn't know any better," said Chellew, estimating she spent nearly \$30,000 on her divorce, which took 10 years to finalize.

"Looking back, I wish I had someone in my life to say, 'Look, get yourself together, you need to know these things, this is how it works, this is what you can expect, this is how you talk to your kids.' "

Shanahan remembers the fear involved.

"When I decided to get a divorce, I just remember being really scared. I just cried every day," she said. Her divorce was finalized four years ago.

Shanahan is a certified divorce financial analyst, trained mediator and a certified daily money manager. She capitalized on her education and experience working in the financial industry by deciding that she would devote her career to helping others going through divorce.

"I just said, 'Catherine, there are so many women who are feeling this alone and you've got to help them,'" Shanahan said. "This is my calling. This is what I'm supposed to do."

After a year of developing their business, Shanahan and Chellew, a paralegal, business manager and administrator who is certified to manage pensions during a divorce, opened Divorce U in Middletown in March. Since then, they've walked more than 100 clients through the divorce process.

It can be a tricky business to market. Most of their business has come from personal and professional referrals. They've also found success with hosting workshops in the community. Divorce U charges a \$190 consultation fee, where they spend more than an hour with a client walking them through the legal process and giving them detailed advice on how to prepare for this major life event. They are not attorneys, so they cannot give legal advice.

Divorce U has a strict policy of no follow-up phone calls. After a client first meets with them to gather information, the Divorce U owners will wait for that person to come to her own decision about her marriage when she is ready. It doesn't always lead to divorce. Sometimes, Shanahan and Chellew will point that client toward the right marriage therapist or help a couple manage their finances.

About 80 percent of Divorce U clients are women. Of those, the majority are affluent women between the ages of 45 and 60.

After 31 years of marriage, Eileen (who asked that her last name be withheld) is seeking a divorce from her husband, a corporate executive who works in Philadelphia. The Devon woman first met with Shanahan early this year, and in September she gained the courage to tell her husband that she wanted a divorce. She has been following the advice from Divorce U on how to prepare for the transition.

"At this stage in my life, it is very hard to start all over again," the 56-year-old said. "One of the hardest parts of this is not knowing what it's going to look like."

Divorce U is helping Eileen, who works as a travel agent, prepare for financial independence. She was once a successful marketing director but left her career behind when she had young children to raise. Shanahan also has helped connect her to other women her age and experience who are also going through a divorce. Inspired by Divorce U, she's hoping to help other women who are divorced, separated or widowed by creating specialized travel retreats just for them.

"I love the sense of support," Eileen said. "Women really need that because there is so much self-doubt, especially for women going through the process."